

BRAC Changes

A Model for the State and Country

In little more than a year, the new Walter Reed National Military Medical Center will open in Bethesda, on the site of the current National Naval Medical Center (NNMC). With the opening of this newly-expanded facility, thousands of additional staff, patients and visitors will come to the area. Many in the community and in local, state and federal governments have been working diligently to plan for this momentous change.

The potential increase in traffic, especially in single-occupancy vehicles, could overwhelm the surrounding neighborhoods and render the area a traffic nightmare well beyond its current situation. The BRAC Implementation Committee (BIC) has been discussing and reviewing possible solutions to the various challenges posed by the merger of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center with the NNMC. The BIC includes representatives from the adjacent neighborhoods, affected institutions, local and state agency representatives and elected officials. The committee has been working to identify ways to reduce traffic congestion and assist pedestrians, cyclists and public transit riders.

As part of those discussions, I presented and discussed my proposal for a Rapid Transit system for the County. I was pleased with the response from the members of the committee who especially appreciated the fact that this system would give staff and visitors multiple routes to get to and from the area. Rapid Transit vehicles would travel regularly on both Connecticut Avenue (MD 185) and Wisconsin Avenue/Rockville Pike. The system would also connect those two major roads via Jones Bridge Road. This system would give commuters and visitors a range of options to travel via reliable and efficient public transit. We will need more than intersection changes along Wisconsin Avenue/Rockville Pike if we are to address adequately the enormous increase in traffic that will come with the merger.

In addition, Councilmember Roger Berliner (District 1) and I wrote Governor Martin O'Malley urging his support for a "Sustainable Transportation Corridor" along MD 355 (Wisconsin Avenue/Rockville Pike) and MD 185 (Connecticut Avenue). This proposal is consistent with both state and federal stated goals for developing sustainable communities. We will continue to work with individuals at the local, state and federal level to explore how this proposal can be implemented

While the changes that will come from the merger are large, I believe we can find solutions that will help ameliorate the anticipated increases in traffic and congestion.